Met Office

NEWS

Bitterly cold with snow

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Staying bitterly cold with severe weather warnings for widespread snow at times for many areas this week.

This is looking like being one of the coldest periods we have had in the UK for a number of years with almost anywhere at risk of seeing snow over the next few days.

Amber and Yellow National Severe Weather Warnings for snow, snow and wind, and snow and ice have been issued for many regions as bands of snow showers move across the UK.

Bitter easterly winds from northern Scandinavia and north west of Russia are crossing the UK bringing not only cold air but also is a significant wind chill risk throughout the week making it feel several degrees colder than thermometers show. Even without the wind chill some locations will struggle to get above 0 °C during the day, with night-time temperatures down to - 8 °C quite widely at times. The lowest temperatures of this spell are expected tomorrow (Wednesday) and Thursday, meaning the cold winter weather will continue into the start of meteorological spring.

Snow showers are already affecting many areas and will get heavier as the day goes on. There are Amber and Yellow National Severe Weather Warning in place today for large parts of the country.

There will be wide regional differences in snow accumulation with some areas seeing marked build-ups of snow of up to 5 to 10 cms while others nearby could see very little. Parts of Scotland could see well in excess of 20 cm of lying snow.

Further snow is expected on Thursday and Friday, as Storm Emma (named by our partners the Portuguese Met Service) pushes into southern England from the continent. This could lead to significantly disruptive snow across southern UK, while gales and freezing rain could pose additional major hazards in places, increasing the risk of power cuts.

Freezing rain is relatively rare in the UK and can be a very hazardous phenomena affecting roads and other infrastructure potentially causing travel disruption. It starts life as snow, ice, or hail, which melts as it passes through a band of warm air as it falls, before refreezing in a band of colder air. The rain droplets become 'supercooled' and are close to or below freezing when they hit the ground, freezing on impact.

Met Office Chief Forecaster, Laura Patterson, said: “This spell of weather is the coldest parts of the country have seen since at least 2013, and there is the potential for disruptive snowfall in many parts throughout the week. Transport disruption is likely in areas with significant snowfall and the cold could have an impact on people’s health.

“Low temperatures mean snowfall is likely to be powdery, bringing the risk of drifting in the strong easterly winds. The areas affected by snow will vary from day to day and so will the areas at the risk of major impacts.

"With the weather so severe at the moment it is really important that everyone keeps up to date with the forecast and warnings in their area, check for local travel information and follow the advice of local authorities and emergency services."

The Met Office is working with partners in road, rail and air transport to help minimize the impacts on the public.

Dr Thomas Waite, of Public Health England’s Extreme Events team, said: “When the wind drives temperatures even lower, the risks to health can increase as even people not normally at risk from cold related illness can feel the effects more. This is why it’s so critical to keep warm; a good way is to keep homes heated to at least 18C.

“In weather like this our bodies have to work harder, older people, young children and those with long term conditions like heart and lung diseases, can really struggle to cope in such low temperatures. So do keep an eye on those at risk, wear several thin layers instead of fewer thicker ones and if you’re able, consider clearing paths of snow and ice. Staying warm will help you stay well – and that’s vital in exceptional weather like this.”

Highways England’s Head of Road Safety, Richard Leonard, said: “Gritters are out treating our routes around the clock but it is still important to drive to the conditions when snow is forecast.

“If you need to travel in the morning, make sure you keep your distance and reduce your speed because, even in conditions that seem normal and when the snow is not settling, it can be slippery if ice patches have formed, or where fresh salt has not been worked into the carriageway.

“Drivers should plan their journeys, monitor weather reports and pack a snow kit of blankets, food, water and a shovel if they really need to travel.”

Transport Minister for Scotland, Humza Yousaf, said “Whilst the worst of the weather is predicted to impact the east of Scotland, the rest of the country is also likely to face wintry conditions, so I’d ask travellers to consider if they need to make their journeys during the amber warning periods. If you do choose to travel during those times, you are very likely to face delays and disruption.

“You can use the Traffic Scotland mobile website or the @trafficscotland twitter page to access the most up to date travel information and to check if your route is affected.

“It’s inevitable that these conditions will also impact on other modes of transport, so if you’re planning to travel by rail, ferry or plane, you should check ahead with the operator to find out if your service has been affected.”

You can find out the current forecast in your area using our forecast pages and by following us on Twitter and Facebook, as well as using our mobile app which is available for iPhone from the App store and for Android from the Google Play store.

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